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Lucia A Keegan 11/08/2006 02:48:47 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS PARIS 07284

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CHARGE: PROG

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INFO RUCNSCO/UNESCO COLLECTIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: USUNESCO - FULBRIGHT SYMPOSIUM

¶1. SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Dina Habib Powell, gave remarks at the Closing Plenary Session of the Fulbright New Century Scholar (NCS) Symposium in at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on October 24, 2006. The Director

General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura, U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Louise Oliver and U.S. Ambassador to France Craig Stapleton also spoke at the conference, where thirty-one Fulbright New Century Scholars from 22 countries gathered to present their recommendations on improving higher education systems worldwide. END SUMMARY

¶2. In an indication of American commitment to global higher education, Assistant Secretary Powell announced that the State Department would continue its financing for another year of inquiry into the issues of access and equity - the first time that the work of a cohort of New Century Scholars has been extended beyond the original yearlong mandate. Assistant Secretary Powell also announced the creation of two new U.S. initiatives: an International Fulbright Science and Technology Award, and an International Fusion Arts Exchange Program. Both programs will enable young people from different countries to come together for academic exchange at American universities. After speaking at the closing session, Assistant Secretary Powell met privately with the Director General to discuss education issues in more detail, and hosted a lunch for the scholars at UNESCO as well.

¶3. At the final Plenary session at UNESCO headquarters the scholars discussed problems confronting higher education around the world - including corruption, discrimination, and the rising cost of education - and each of the working groups laid out a series of recommendations for how such threats could be minimized. Their proposals include creating national or regional evaluation bodies to examine both the academic quality and physical infrastructure of universities, developing curricula that reflect social problems, setting clear standards for student and faculty conduct, establishing mechanisms to ensure that low-income students have access to higher education, and defining "reasonable" conditions for foreign students to secure visas and study permits.

¶4. The closing plenary session was hosted by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, The French

Fulbright Commission and the U.S. Permanent Mission to UNESCO, with the help and cooperation of UNESCO staff at all levels of the planning. All UNESCO ambassadors were invited to the session, and many of them attended.

15. COMMENT: Holding the closing plenary session at UNESCO provided an opportunity to showcase USG efforts and policy in the realm of higher education to a UNESCO audience. On a practical level, the US Mission was able to broaden its contact base and develop more cooperative relationships with the Education Sector and the Bureau of Public Information. Several scholars noted that the program had provided perspective-widening opportunities. A press release was sent out to a wide base of US and UNESCO media contacts, and the event was covered by the Chronicle of Higher Education, whose journalist conducted in-depth interviews with several NCS scholars and Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Farrell, and published a feature on the symposium on October 25, 2006. END COMMENT

16. This cable was approved by Assistant Secretary Powell's office.

OLIVER